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SUBJECT: GHANA ELECTION ANALYSIS: NPP LIKELY TO WIN

Classified By: PolChief Scott Ticknor for reasons 1.5 d and e.

1. (C) Summary: The ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) is likely to win Ghana's December 7 parliamentary and presidential election. The NPP is well-positioned in its traditional strongholds, the heavily populated Ashanti and Eastern regions (with 67 combined constituencies out of a total of 230.) The NPP is spending heavily and highlights its record of peace and economic growth. The main opposition party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), is strong in the Volta, Northern, Upper West and Upper East regions, which together have 58 constituencies. Greater Accra, Brong Ahafo, Central and Western regions are close races, reportedly with large numbers of undecided voters. The NDC is focusing on the alleged poor performance of the NPP government, but is handicapped by poor finances and a legacy of human rights abuses. The election outcome will reflect a mix of ethnicity, performance, personality, and other variables. End summary.

NPP Strongholds

2. (C) The Ashanti region, with 39 parliamentary constituencies, is President Kufuor's home territory and the NPP heartland. The NPP was founded in Ashanti and won 80 percent of presidential votes in the 2000 run-off election. The party has been actively spreading money, food and other resources around the region to cement its support, while highlighting its performance in the area over the past four years. Nonetheless, the NPP is unlikely to do as well as in 2000. The NDC will probably make small inroads, capitalizing on areas of discontent about government performance and support from pockets of non-Ashantis living in the region. The Eastern region, with 28 constituencies, is also a traditional NPP stronghold. Five out of 19 Cabinet officials come from Eastern region, including the Finance and Foreign Ministers.

NDC's Base in the North and East

3. (C) The NDC's traditional vote bank has been in the Volta region (22 constituencies), where it won 89 percent of the presidential vote in 2000. The hostile reception President Kufuor received while campaigning in Volta region suggests this largely Ewe area, home to former President JJ Rawlings, still strongly distrusts the Ashanti-dominated NPP.

4. (C) The NDC should also win in the Northern region (26 constituencies), as well as the Upper West (10 seats) and Upper East (13 seats). The NDC won narrowly in the Northern region in 2000. However, perceptions of NPP complicity in and/or slowness to seek justice for, the 2002 murder of the Ya Na (the Dagbon Andani Chief) will likely hurt the NPP in this election, even with the recent, conciliatory visit to the area by President Kufuor. Strong NPP candidates and inroads by other parties could slightly erode the NDC's hold on the Upper East, which tipped strongly in the NDC's favor in 2000.

Four Swing Regions

5. (C) The Greater Accra (27 constituencies), Brong Ahafo (24), Central (19) and Western (22) regions are more difficult to call, with large number of reportedly undecided voters and a mixed historical voting record. In Greater Accra, the NPP won massively in 2000 but lost in 1996. Economic hardships in this predominantly urban area could hurt the NPP.

6. (C) In Central region, the NPP won decisively in 2000 and is confident that high cocoa prices and public works in the region will bring a repeat victory. However, the NDC has been campaigning hard in this region, presidential candidate Atta Mills' home turf.

7. (C) The NPP won 62 percent of the presidential ballots in Western region in 2000, with a more even match in parliamentary seats. The NPP appears better organized in the region and is spending heavily to repeat their victory.

While anti-incumbency sentiment could reduce the NPP's winning margin in the presidential race, it is likely to gain some parliamentary seats.

18. (C) Brong Ahafo has traditionally been split between the NDC and NPP. The NPP should do well in cocoa and timber areas, while the NDC should win in areas with settlers from other regions. The NPP has been spending heavily in this region and hopes its 60 percent win in the 2000 presidential race will be repeated.

The Big Picture -----

19. (C) The NDC campaign has been slow to build momentum. Its vice presidential candidate was knocked out of campaigning after being seriously injured in a car accident. However, the party has recently energized a door-to-door campaign, stressing Kufuor's alleged failure to fulfill promises. The NDC has a solid network of party workers but its finances are tight, and many voters are reportedly uncomfortable with the human rights and economic legacy of former PNDC president JJ Rawlings. Fears about the NDC may be reinforced by the final report of the National Reconciliation Commission (parts of which were leaked to the media), linking Rawlings to the 1982 murder of three High Court judges and a retired army officer.

10. (C) The NPP has the benefits and handicaps of incumbency. It is better organized and financed, has greater access to the media, and has been aggressive at strategically distributing money, goods, and projects for electoral gain. However, it has suffered from internal squabbles and faces criticism about some unfulfilled promises. According to a nationwide opinion poll conducted in June, 2004 by the National Commission for Civic Education, the top voter concerns (in rank order) are: educational standards, access to affordable health care, the high cost of living, and unemployment. Despite macroeconomic achievements the NPP has highlighted in campaign ads, many of our contacts believe most Ghanaians do not feel economically better off than four years ago. These voters may still vote NPP, our contacts concede, because they are not ready to go back to NDC rule.

Comment -----

11. (C) While there are no opinion polls, campaign 2004 appears to be a competitive match between the NDC (which currently has 89 parliamentary seats) and the NPP (with 103 seats). At play are a mix of ethnicity, performance, personality, legacy, and other factors. The NPP enjoys an overwhelming advantage in distributing resources and using the benefits of incumbency. It also benefits from the fears still conjured by the NDC. One Ghanaian told PolChief she was switching her vote from NDC to NPP out of disgust for Rawlings' recent alleged assault on a District Chief Executive in Upper East.

12. (C) We believe the NPP will do well in both the parliamentary and presidential elections. The NPP is likely to win a first round victory in the presidential race (it needs to win 50 percent of votes, plus one ballot, to prevent a second round run-off). In 2000, the polling went to a second round because five small parties garnered a combined 7 percent of the popular vote, leaving the NDC with 44.5 percent and the NPP with 48.1 percent of the total tally. This year, only two small parties are competing with the NDC and NPP and neither has gained much traction in the presidential race. The Convention Peoples Party (CPP) could gain several parliamentary seats (it currently has one), while the People's National Convention party (PNC) is unlikely to improve on its current three seats.
YATES